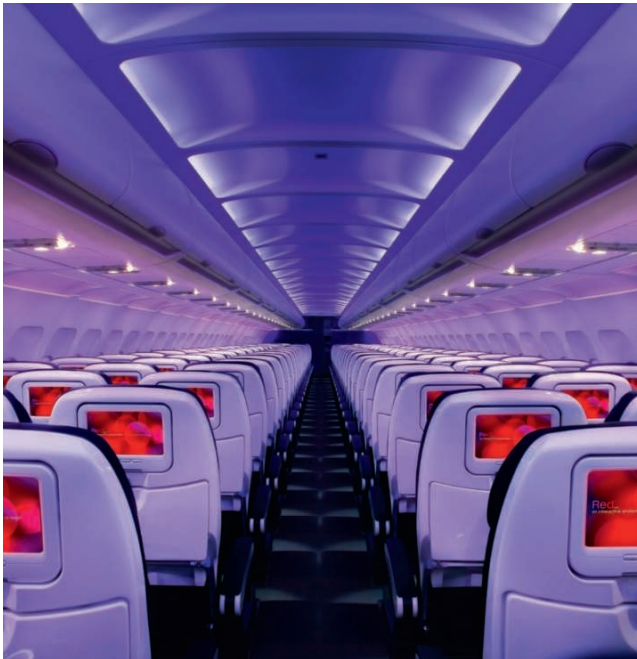


# VIRGIN AMERICA



Virgin America

**“The airline was built from the ground up, allowing us to incorporate technology and to create a consistent experience”**

**LUANNE CALVERT**

VP marketing, Virgin America

**W**hen Virgin America fought to win two gates at Dallas Love Field airport in 2014, it enlisted the help of Virgin founder Sir Richard Branson himself to back a viral online campaign that had social media buzzing.

Branson, starring in a YouTube video titled “An Open Love Letter to Love Field”, made a play for the support of the Dallas community. “No one should have a monopoly on your love,” Branson coos in his love letter to the airport in the video. “It’s time to let our love take flight, no matter how hard they try to keep us apart.”

The saucy video – along with an online petition that gained

28,000 signatures – was yet another example of Virgin America’s trademark tongue-in-cheek marketing strategy. The campaign clearly was a success – the airline was later confirmed as the winner of the two gates.

Known in US airline circles as the California-based carrier that doesn’t take itself too seriously, Virgin America has set itself apart from its older US airline peers with its mood lighting cabins and a safety video that would look more at home on MTV. The video, featuring rhyming lyrics and dancing cabin crew, has logged more than 10 million views on YouTube.

“Virgin America clearly sees marketing as multifaceted and takes a holistic approach,” said one of the judges.

Indeed, the airline keeps all aspects of the passenger experience in mind when marketing itself. “It’s not just in terms of cabin experience, but also our operational excellence,” says Virgin America vice-president of marketing and communications Luanne Calvert. Indicators like on-time performance and lost baggage rates are “not as sexy”, but the airline knows delivering in those areas is equally important in keeping customers happy, she says.

Being the US airline industry’s youngest carrier has helped. Virgin America was the first mover in rolling out a completely wi-fi-equipped fleet, and seats on its aircraft come with power outlets – cherished by today’s connected traveller. Teenagers flying on the airline are delighted by the seat-to-

seat chat function, notes Calvert. “The airline was built from the ground up. It allowed us to incorporate a lot of technology and to create a consistent experience,” she adds.

Calvert brings Silicon Valley experience – she’s a former Google and Yahoo executive – and has been surprised by how many similarities she has seen at Virgin: “The collaborative environment and teamwork are very crucial.”

Being a low-cost carrier, the airline has fewer resources than its US legacy counterparts. Each person on Calvert’s team does the job of two to three people, she says.

Up next on the airline’s marketing agenda are its new Hawaiian services from November, which Calvert says is the direct result of customer feedback. “People like to fly and earn their points and burn their points on leisure travel... they wanted to go to Hawaii, and we are now going to include that in our itinerary.”

Offering a sought-after product and great service is more than half the battle won. “It allows us in marketing to talk about the product, and encourage our customers and the media to do the talking for us.”

**GHIM-LAY YEO**



Virgin America

**Calvert brings tech background**

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